UNBiodiversity Lab

2025 Annual Report

Executive Summary

The relationship between nature and human development has constantly evolved to reshape our societies, economies, and the planet. To help achieve sustainable outcomes, access to reliable and timely spatial data on biodiversity is fundamental. Spatial data is key to enable stakeholders to visualize interactions between human activities and the environment, and follow trends on interactive maps, thus enabling them to prioritize action, as well as to monitor and report on changes over time. This use of spatial data is fundamental for relevant public and private decision-making.

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and the associated package of decisions at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) in December 2022. The Framework comprises four overarching goals and 23 action-oriented targets that seek to address the biodiversity crisis, promote sustainable use, and encourage the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biodiversity and genetic resources. At the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP16), held in October 2024, the focus shifted to implementation of the Framework. Target 1 of the KMGBF calls on countries to undertake participatory, integrated, and biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, for which spatial data is crucial. The importance of integrated spatial planning is recognized as a further potential area of work under the Convention (Decision 16/12 and CBD/SBSTTA/REC/27/6). Likewise, the application of the monitoring framework of the KMGBF (Decision 15/5 and Decision 16/31) to create the Seventh National Report (7NR), due in February 2026, will require spatial data availability, among others, as well as consistent, standardized, and scalable tracking of the global goals and targets. In 2025, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) updated an analysis that shows that 41% of headline indicators and 36% of component indicators have metadata that encourages the use of spatial data.

To create sustained impacts towards the achievement of the KMGBF, as well as related international agreements, it is essential that national decision-makers have access to spatial data for planning, monitoring, and reporting. Many countries have robust national spatial data, but it may be siloed across different servers or actors and not easily accessible. For other countries, access to accurate spatial data remains difficult due to major capacity gaps, high server costs, and expensive software. Additionally, facilitation of automated analyses may enable rapid decision-making and thus be advantageous for any country.

The **UN Biodiversity Lab (UNBL)** was created to enable governments and other non-commercial stakeholders to have access to the best available global data to support action for nature, climate, and sustainable development.

The UNBL mission is three-fold:

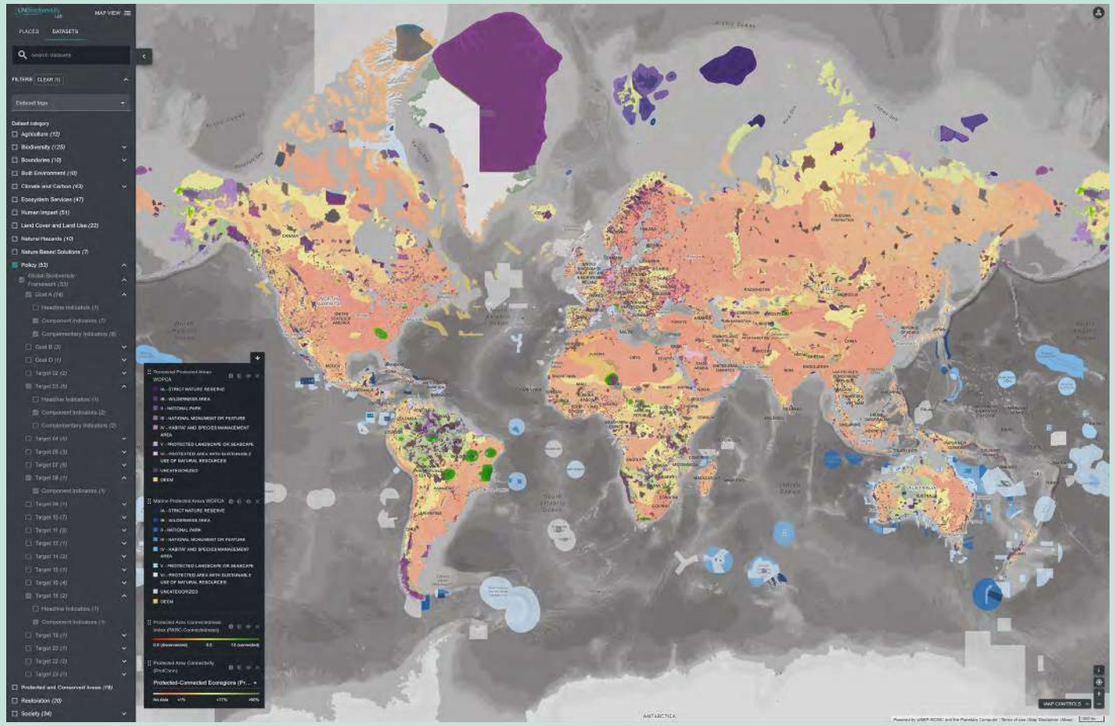
1. To democratize access to spatial data and analytic tools as a digital public good.
2. To support decision-makers to leverage spatial data for insight, priority-setting, and implementation at the national level.
3. To empower stakeholders to use spatial data for nationally led monitoring and reporting.

UNBL is overseen by a partnership between the CBD Secretariat, UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and UNEP-WCMC.

This annual report presents the key activities, outcomes, and achievements of the UNBL Partnership in 2025.

UNBL at a Glance

UNBL is a free, open-source platform that supports country-led efforts to use spatial data and analytic tools to generate insight that can lead to the implementation of impactful measures for biodiversity-inclusive sustainable development. The platform seeks to support this transformation by enabling national experts to combine user-provided national data in a single repository, supplement them as needed with UN-vetted global datasets, and use the platform's tools to visualize, overlap and analyze them for national decision-making. Users can use spatial prioritization tools added in 2025 to run biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning analyses to support the delivery of Targets 1-12 of the KMGBF for any country in the world. Additionally, they can display area-based indicators and metrics for their country to facilitate monitoring and reporting on the KMGBF, subject to national needs and preferences. UNBL strives to develop functionality that does not require GIS expertise and to make all materials available, to the extent possible, in English, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.



Protected Areas from the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) (UNEP-WCMC, 2026)[1], Protected Area Connectedness Index (Harwood et al., 2022)[2], and Protected Area Connectivity datasets on UNBL (Saura et al., 2017)[3].

1 UNEP-WCMC, 2026. The World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA)[On-line]. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net.
2 Harwood, Tom; Ware, Chris; Hoskins, Andrew; Ferrier, Simon (2022): PARC: Protected Area Connectedness Index v2: 30s global layer 2020. v1. CSIRO. Data Collection. https://doi.org/10.25919/kt3f-2z04
3 Saura, S., Bastin, L., Battistella, L., Mandrici, A., Dubois, G., 2017. Protected areas in the world's ecoregions: How well connected are they? Ecological Indicators 76, 144–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2016.12.047

UNBL combines the latest technology, the best available global data, secure workspaces to upload users' own data, user-friendly analytics, and a powerful UN-led partnership to support national action for nature, climate, and sustainable development.

UNBL's value proposition

In an increasingly complex landscape of tools, platforms, and resources, UNBL strives to offer user-driven solutions that are nationally relevant, policy-driven, and can be customized based on country needs. We work to reduce fragmentation by forging partnerships with similar initiatives and with custodians of essential public good data, all with a focus on meeting the needs of our end users. UNBL is evolving while focusing on its core strengths:

- **UNBL is a platform and a decision-support system –** it can be used by governments to plan, monitor, and report on KMGBF implementation.
- **UNBL is built for governments, but usable by all –** it is a tool serving CBD Parties, but also used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers, and Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendants.
- **UNBL is developed in response to global policy processes –** it directly supports Targets 1-12 of the KMGBF and can be used to support action on nationally determined contributions on climate change (NDCs), land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets, and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **UNBL is backed by UN agencies and the CBD Secretariat –** it brings legitimacy, trust, and national ownership that commercial platforms can't match.
- **UNBL is used in real-world policy decisions –** it has supported national policy development and reporting in several countries, including Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Uganda, providing Parties with baseline data and spatial analysis results for aligning national targets with KMGBF guidelines, as well as drafting 7NRs to the CBD.

As we look towards 2026, we have a narrowing policy window as countries continue to revise and begin implementation of their national biodiversity plans under the CBD, as well as the equivalent national policy documents for accelerated, focused action on climate change and land degradation. These policy documents will guide national action for the next five years, one of the most critical windows to bend the curve on biodiversity loss and to address the climate crisis. Additionally, 2026 marks the deadline for national reporting across the three UN conventions on biodiversity, climate, and land. These reports provide an opportunity to assess collective progress, as well as a challenge to identify and use the necessary data to meaningfully monitor against international commitments. UNBL supports this critical work.

UNBL by numbers in 2025

84,279 platform views from **31,770** unique users.

840+ attendees in **12** UNBL events and trainings.

3,817 registered users from **160** countries.

397 government users from **91** countries.

1,190 global data layers grouped in **273** datasets, including **87** new data layers added in 2025

256 UNBL workspaces that allow non-commercial users to incorporate national data alongside global data

57 secure workspaces created specifically for governments

43 places and **162** layers have been uploaded in governmental users' workspaces.

100+ responses to user questions.

28 new communication products.

2025 | UNBL activities in 2025 included:

1 | UNBL governance

The UNBL Partnership works together to shape the UNBL vision, mission, and activities to support the use of spatial data to generate insight and impact for conservation and sustainable development. Our governance activities have remained steadfast throughout our operational period: strategic planning, priority setting, relationship building, and fundraising. Throughout 2025, our governance efforts increasingly focused on embedding UNBL within broader institutional systems, strengthening partnerships across the biodiversity data ecosystem, and positioning UNBL as a long-term, sustainable digital public good.

In 2025, the UNBL Partnership continued implementing its 2022-2030 Strategic Plan through the operationalization of US$2 million in funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to further develop UNBL to support countries in their work around planning, monitoring, and reporting on the CBD's KMGBF. As a central element of this work, the Partnership actively followed key CBD negotiations to identify areas UNBL could support, worked to reduce fragmentation by building partnerships with related initiatives, and delivered sustained technical assistance and capacity building across 11 countries through tailored national engagement. These efforts supported countries in using spatial data for the development and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), as well as preparation of the 7NR to the CBD. In parallel, the UNBL team participated in and organized a wide range of international events, technical workshops, and webinars to raise awareness of the platform, strengthen user communities, and provide hands-on training on accessing data, metrics, and spatial planning tools.

Specific activities in 2025 included:

- **Review of key negotiation topics under CBD with respect to the use of spatial data to support planning, monitoring and implementation of the KMGBF:** the UNBL Partnership continued to closely follow negotiations and decisions under the CBD related to spatial data, as well as feedback and commentary from Parties (see Box 1). Building on these decisions, the UNBL team strengthened partnerships and offerings around biodiversity-inclusive integrated spatial planning, and scoped pathways for supporting the work of both Parties and newly established regional Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centres (TSCCs). In practice, this resulted in additional offerings through the UNBL platform, including newly developed pages around spatial planning, increased number of spatial data and metrics, and the launching of the ELSA integrated spatial planning tools.

- **National work with 11 countries to support the use of spatial data for national action on the KMGBF:** the UNBL Partnership implemented in-depth national engagements with six countries – Cuba, Ecuador, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Malawi, and South Africa – as well as implementation of specific activities in response to national requests for support in three countries – Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, and Sri Lanka – through the 'UNBL-GBF Mapping Project'. These countries engaged in tailored workstreams around (1) spatial planning, and (2) monitoring and reporting, selecting activities aligned with national priorities for NBSAP update and implementation, preparation of the 7NR, and synergies across the Rio Conventions. This work resulted in concrete national outputs, including spatial prioritization maps generated with the Essential

Life Support Area (ELSA) Integrated Spatial Planning Tool, national UNBL workspaces hosting curated datasets, national indicators, technical reports, and policy notes for decision-makers (*see section 5 on user engagement for further information*). Collectively, these country projects generated tangible use cases for UNBL that demonstrate how spatial data and planning tools can directly support national decision-making and KMGBF implementation, thereby providing potential uptake opportunities for other CBD Parties.

- **Partnership building to support countries to implement KMGBF Target 1 on biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning:** the UNBL Partnership continued to work through the Expert Advisory Committee on Spatial Data and Planning, bringing together experts from Parties, UN agencies, NGOs, and academia to guide the scientific, technical, and policy development of the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool. In parallel, UNBL fostered a broader coalition of countries, tool developers, and research institutions working on spatial prioritization, including ELSA, Marxan Planning Platform, and WePlan Forests. These collaborations culminated in high-level joint communications, guidance materials, and a side event at the twenty-seventh meeting of the subsidiary body on scientific, technical, and technological advice (SBSTTA27) to the CBD. This work aimed at reducing fragmentation, promoting interoperability, encouraging collaboration, and clearly communicating the complementary roles of different tools in supporting national implementation of KMGBF Target 1 and related targets, as called for in CBD/COP/DEC/16/12 on scientific and technical needs and in CBD/SBSTTA/REC/27/6 on areas of potential further work, including biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, in the context of the KMGBF.

- **Collaboration with data partners, platforms, and institutions to support monitoring and reporting on the KMGBF:** the UNBL Partnership strengthened its relationships with spatial data providers, resulting in updates to datasets and metadata on the UNBL platform. We also implemented new metrics informing land use change, OECMs coverage and protected areas connectivity as well as GBF Headline Indicators 10.1 and 10.2 in collaboration with FAO (see Section 2 for additional details).

- In parallel, institutional collaborations were advanced with platforms supporting national reporting and aggregation, including the CBD Online Reporting Tool, the Online Reporting System (ORS) supporting MEAs, BON in a Box, and Target Tracker. These efforts focused on improving interoperability, reducing duplication, and enabling Parties to move more seamlessly between platforms when accessing data, indicators, and reporting tools. Towards the end of 2025 and into 2026, development of an open UNBL SpatioTemporal Asset Catalog (STAC) began, with the aim of providing direct access to the data displayed on UNBL that is sharable under the original data license. This facilitates data access to other tools and initiatives, further embedding the platform within the wider digital ecosystem for biodiversity monitoring and planning.

Box 1. CBD documents and decisions regarding the role of spatial data in implementation of the KMGBF

- As of 26 January 2026, per the CBD Online Reporting Tool (ORT), 146 Parties have submitted updated targets, **93.95% of which have submitted at least one spatially relevant target** (Targets 1-12).
- Additionally, **more than half of Parties** have defined specific component, complementary and/or national indicators that they would use in addition to the headline indicators to monitor progress.
- An analysis developed by UNDP and UNEP-WCMC in the second iteration of the Technical Report "Using Spatial Data to Support the Development of Plans for National Monitoring Systems for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework" indicates that 41% of headline indicators and 36% of component indicators in the KMGBF monitoring framework, all related to Targets 1-12, encourage the use of spatial data for monitoring and reporting on the KMGBF.
- CBD Decision 15/6 on the mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting, and review further urges all Parties to use the headline indicators in relevant **national planning processes** and requests all Parties to use the headline indicators for national reporting under the Convention.
- Parties have expressed **inequalities in their ability** to generate, organize, and share biodiversity-relevant data and a need for capacity building and development as well as scientific and technical cooperation (summarized in CBD/COP/16/INF/24).
- Parties have likewise identified that **work could be advanced around biodiversity-inclusive spatial data** as part of efforts to address scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the KMGBF (CBD/COP/DEC/16/12).
- In response, the Executive Secretary invited the **submission of views and relevant information on biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning**, the results of which are summarized in CBD/SBSTTA/27/5/Add.3, which includes multiple references to the **ELSA framework developed by the UNBL Partnership**.
- CBD/SBSTTA/REC/27/6 recommends **a two-part strategy** moving forward for integrated spatial planning:
  - Deferring the development of further work related to spatial planning under the Convention **until the release of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services assessment in 2028**.
  - As an interim measure, the **Secretariat will prepare a report on experiences with biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning**, drawing on inputs into the global review, and **hold a workshop for relevant experts**.
- In partnership with the CBD Secretariat, UNBL produced an 'other' conference document for the 27th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA27) highlighting a subset of spatial planning tools available to Parties, including the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on UNBL.
- CBD/COP/16/13 points to the importance of the newly selected regional and subregional TSCCs to provide region- and country-specific capacity building, including around spatial data and planning.
- UNBL has been further developed, and will continue to undergo enhancements, to provide access to spatial data and spatial analytic tools to support Parties in their work related to the documents and decisions listed here, in collaboration with data partners, indicator custodians, and the TSCCs.

2 | UNBL development

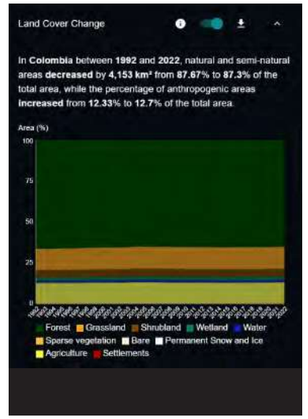
UNBL is one of the most technologically advanced platforms in terms of geospatial visualization and analytics available. Our team of software engineers ensures UNBL technology evolves to keep up with technological innovation and adapts to user needs through feedback-driven updates, user testing, and national customization based on capacity and needs. In 2025, major developments involved enhancement of the UNBL technical infrastructure, an improved data layer search functionality, improved functionality of secure workspaces for national data, refinement and addition of new pre-calculated metrics, and release of a novel implementation of revised integrated spatial planning methodology through the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool to support national action for KMGBF Targets 1-12.

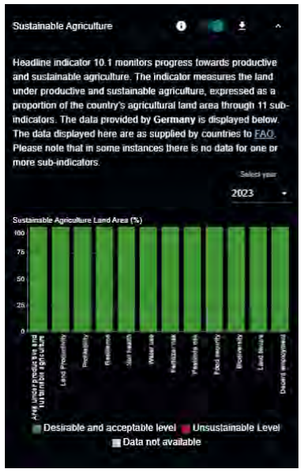
Specific activities in 2025 included:

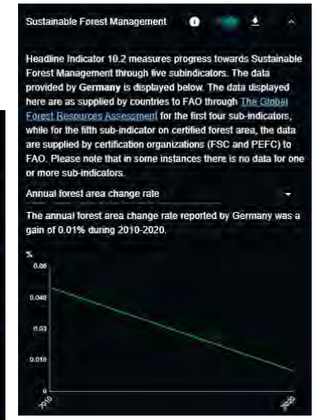
- **UNBL technology stack enhancements:** This included upgrades to core libraries on both the front and back end to keep the platform up to date; implementation of deployment pipelines to streamline the deployment process; dockerization of the code to make development easier; and reconfiguration of the cloud infrastructure of the platform to optimize for performance and reduce costs.
- **Dynamic metrics and indicators:** Building on the re-engineering of the original eight dynamic metrics in 2024, the UNBL metric offering was expanded in 2025[4]. This included:
  - Addition of two KMGBF headline indicators supporting monitoring progress towards sustainable agriculture and forest management for KMGBF Target 10;
  - Addition of a new metric on land cover change using the European Space Agency Climate Change Initiative (ESA CCI)'s 300m resolution dataset;
  - Addition of the Protected Connected (ProtConn) Index, in collaboration with BON in a Box, as a proof of concept that can be built upon for future pipelines; and finally,
  - Enhancement and updates to the Protected Areas metric to include the most recent data from the WDPCA (previously WDPA), now additionally displaying Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

Substantial analytical work was undertaken to assess readiness of additional indicators, with coastal eutrophication and subnational protected area metrics under development for future implementation. In parallel, a new functionality was designed to allow users to apply metric calculations to their own uploaded raster datasets within workspaces, with Ecuador serving as the first national country set to pilot the feature on UNBL. These new developments are planned for release in 2026.

4 In UNBL, the term dynamic metric is used to describe performance measures that are responsive to external variables or shifting system conditions. Unlike static benchmarks, dynamic metrics provide a current-state view of a process by incorporating the latest available data to reflect environmental fluctuations and track environmental impacts. In UNBL, the term indicator refers to KMGBF indicators, including headline, complimentary and component indicators.







Screenshots of selected dynamic metrics and headline indicators on UNBL. To view, please launch the UNBL map and select a country in the Places tab.

- **Improvements to data layer reliability with the following implementations:** Added a data layer health test tool to identify layers that are failing to load on UNBL; an automated notification system for all layer updates, improving visibility across the UNBL team and simplifying layer update reviews; enhanced layer caching to speed up load times; replacement of a costly and faulty elastic search service with a more functional, cheaper in-house solution; and added extra metadata fields to layer description boxes to foster UNBL layer compliance with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 19115 standard on Geographic Metadata Information.
- **Major upgrade to workspace features, including improved layer and place configuration:** To support increased uptake of national data on UNBL, new functionalities include users' ability to upload places and data layers without the need for specialized GIS software. Improvements include increased clarity and structure of the user interface; ability to conduct direct uploads of raster GeoTIFF files and apply custom styling; ability to connect to and visualize data from Google Earth Engine and multiple geospatial web services such as WMS, WMTS, ArcGIS REST Services and STAC assets; ability to upload places in Esri Shapefile, KML/KMZ and/or GeoJSON format; as well as the ability to make data of choice publicly available via a URL. Please see this user-friendly guide to see UNBL's latest workspace features.

- **ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool launched on UNBL:** In early 2025, the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool was implemented on UNBL to support national implementation of the KMGBF. The ELSA Tool supports governments to use integrated spatial planning to efficiently and cost-effectively identify where nature-based actions can best contribute to national priorities for biodiversity, climate, and human well-being. The ELSA Tool uses systematic conservation planning, the gold standard in spatial planning, to enable users to run several iterations of spatial prioritization analyses to identify where protection, management, restoration, and urban greening can best support delivery of KMGBF Targets for biodiversity, ecosystem services, and sustainable development (1-4, 7-8, and 10-12) in their country. The ELSA Tool is the result of five years of collaborative development across Parties, the UNBL team, and two Expert Advisory Committees whose role was to provide scientific and policy advice. They were formed by representatives from Colombia (Ministry of Environment, UNDP Colombia, Humboldt Institute), Costa Rica (Ministry of Environment and Energy, PRIAS Lab), South Africa (UNDP South Africa, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment), CBD Secretariat, Conservation International, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Montana State University, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat, University of British Columbia, University of Queensland, UNDP, UNEP-WCMC, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity identified biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning as one of the areas requiring additional scientific and technical advice. Observing ELSA in action, and its support to national decision-makers in designing and implementing their NBSAPs, strengthens the foundation for best practices and knowledge exchange among the Parties to respond to this need around integrated spatial planning.

Jamal Annagylyjova
Forest Biodiversity Officer and Lead on
Terrestrial Ecosystems Restoration, CBD Secretariat

What Key Features Does UNBL Offer?

UNBL provides a set of features that support country-led efforts to use spatial data and analytic tools for planning, monitoring, and reporting on their NBSAPs. These features can also support other user groups working at the intersection of biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable development. The platform is available in English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish and does not require GIS experience to use.

UNBL features were updated extensively throughout 2024 and 2025 to support national action around the KMGBF, with selected development continuing in 2026. Current and future features include:

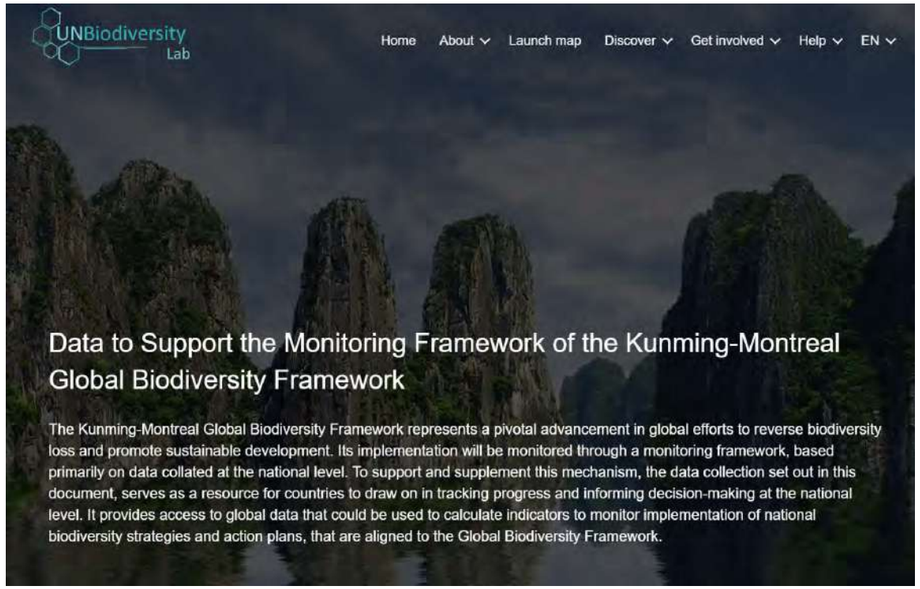
Current Features	Future Developments
Secure workspaces for non-commercial users to: ■ Add and manage national spatial data through uploading geospatial files or connecting directly to existing data repositories using a simplified and streamlined layer configuration, apply custom styles to data layers, and view in tandem with global datasets published to UNBL's public platform. ■ Tag national datasets by NBSAP/KMGBF/other national policy target and indicator. ■ Upload any geographic areas of interest through a wide range of vector format files and display dynamic metrics (zonal statistics) for them. ■ Clip and export public UNBL layers using a simple point and click method and use them in external geospatial software applications, without having to download entire global-scale datasets. ■ Provide access to workspaces privately with a curated group of users. ■ Enable external users to view selected datasets in secure work-spaces through a map view URL.	Secure workspaces will be enhanced in 2026 with a new feature that enables the creation of dynamic metric displays for user uploaded datasets.
Push-button calculation of 10 dynamic metrics at the national level and display of two KMGBF headline indicators	New widgets will continue to be added for display of select KMGBF indicators and additional metrics.
Access to over 1,000 global spatial data layers, including data referenced in the KMGBF monitoring framework, curated for national use on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human well-being to fill national data gaps, as needed.	UNBL datasets are continually reviewed and updated.
Curated data collections for policymakers that could be used to calculate indicators to monitor implementation of the KMGBF at the national level as well as on objectives related to protected areas (Target 3), restoration (Target 2), and nature-based solutions for climate change (Target 8).	
Extensive documentation and guidance provided in 5 languages enabling new users to easily apply UNBL for their needs.	UNBL documentation and guidance are continually reviewed and updated.
Ability to develop priority action maps for KMGBF Targets 1, 2, 3, and 12, that provide powerful co-benefits for Targets 4-11, using the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on UNBL.	

3 | UNBL data

The UNBL Partnership continued to conduct horizon scanning to ensure the platform includes the latest data relevant to nature, climate, and sustainable development. This process helps maintain accuracy, relevance, and currentness, ensuring that all UNBL data meets our quality standards. The global data made available through the platform is intended to support countries to fill national data gaps, as appropriate, for work at the national level. Over the past year, this work focused on adding new data that can be used in the context of the KMGBF monitoring framework to support governments as they continue to work to prepare the 7NR for CBD, as well as reaching out to current data provider partners to enhance existing datasets and their metadata display on UNBL.

Specific activities in 2025 included:

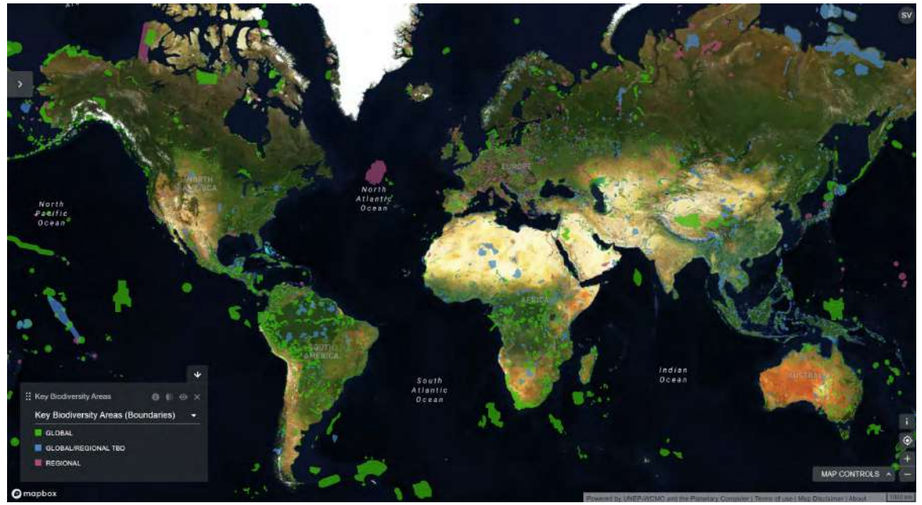
Updated data collections



The UNBL Data to Support the Monitor-ing Framework of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework data collection, released in April 2024, was updated in July 2025 and continues to be available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian.

- The collection provides a list of global spatial datasets that could be used to calculate indicators to monitor implementation of NBSAPs.
- All data included in this data collection are the global spatial data referenced in the indicator metadata (available on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Indicators website and in CBD/COP/16/INF/3/Rev.1) associated with decision CBD/COP/DEC/31/16 on the monitoring framework for the KMGBF as of June 2025.

New data added/updated by the UNBL team

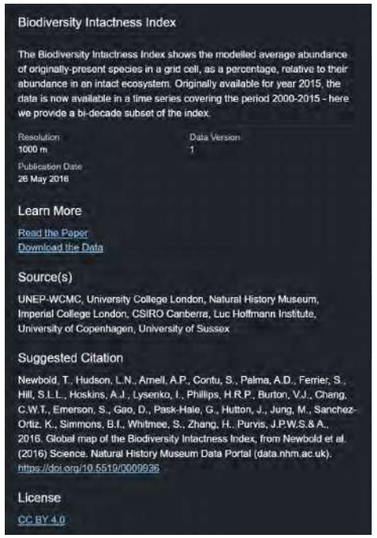


In 2025, 87 new data layers were identified and added to the platform by the UNBL Data Team. All these new additions were reviewed against our UNBL data criteria, and made available on the UNBL public platform.

The most prominent data updates included:

- Updated Ramsar Sites data to include the most recent release by Ramsar.
- Updated Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) data to include the most recent release by the KBA Partnership.
- Added Global Lakes and Wetlands Database v2 by HydroSHEDS, World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) US, TNC, and McGill University.
- Added Chloris Global Biomass data by Chloris.
- Added UNESCO Biosphere Reserves data by UNEP-WCMC and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Added LandMark: Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' lands and territories data by LandMark.
- Added Global Gridded Relative Deprivation Index data by CIESIN.
- Added Nature's Contributions to People data by University of Minnesota, Stanford University, and SPRING.
- Added GEBCO Grid 2025 - a continuous terrain model of the global oceans and land data by GEBCO Bathymetric Compilation Group.
- Added Global Landslide Susceptibility data by the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute.
- Added Multidimensional Poverty Index data by the University of Oxford.
- Added Ecological Intactness Index data by the University of Queensland – this dataset is listed as a component indicator for Goal A of the KMGBF.

Metadata updates to existing UNBL data



In 2025, the metadata for 269 currently hosted datasets underwent review and updates to ensure that all information associated is current, accurate, and reflects each dataset's most up-to-date status. Entering 2026, the UNBL team plans to conduct another comprehensive round of updates to enhance and organize metadata for all layers in line with the ISO 19115 standard on Geographic Metadata Information.

Concerted due diligence outreach to data providers and partners

To enhance openness and transparency, the team undertook extensive outreach to dataset owners whose data is displayed on the UNBL platform, sending 170 notifications covering 240 datasets hosted under open licenses. In a few cases, feedback was provided on how the hosted data on UNBL can be more reliably/accurately presented or updated to more recent versions of the data. This ongoing effort is a core part of UNBL's work to collaborate with and draw attention to the work of institutions that develop and provide spatial data as a digital public good.

The contamination of natural environments with plastic waste is one of the biggest risks to the natural environment of our times. The UN Biodiversity Lab played a particularly important role supporting the technical foundations of this report: we used two of the datasets available on UNBL, which proved highly valuable for supporting the spatial analysis and strengthening the assessment of impacts on biodiversity. The accessibility and quality of this information significantly enhanced the robustness of the study.

Lenin Corrales, Environmental Analyst

4 | UNBL training, capacity-building and events

In 2025, the UNBL Partnership delivered training and capacity development, including high-level events at major international fora and tailored on-demand sessions. Our efforts focused on enhancing awareness and providing stakeholders with the tools needed to leverage UNBL for diverse applications, promoting the integration of spatial data into initiatives aimed at conserving biodiversity and supporting its sustainable use.

Technical guidance and scientific papers released in 2025 include:

Using Spatial Data to Support the Development of Plans for National Monitoring Systems for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

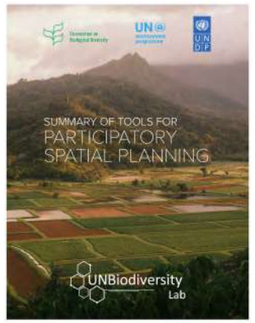
This guidance aims to support Parties to undertake a detailed assessment of available national spatial data and spatial tools that can be used as part of a national monitoring system for the KMGBF. Parties can use this document to: (1) review indicators that require spatial data for their calculation, (2) identify, view, and download the spatial global data that are referenced in the indicator metadata available on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Indicators website and in CBD/COP/16/INF/3/Rev.1 associated with CBD/COP/DEC/16/31 as of July 2025, and that could be used to calculate indicators to monitor the implementation of NBSAPs, and (3) access checklists and guidance to identify existing national spatial data as well as national data gaps. The guidance was updated in 2025 following the decisions of COP16.

This guidance is available in English, French, and Spanish, and was an offering for the GEF-funded Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support Project implemented by UNDP and UNEP.

Updated Comprehensive UNBL User Guidance on the Public Platform, Secure Workspaces, and ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool

The UNBL User Guide was overhauled and updated in December 2025 to reflect the newest features available on the UNBL platform. All guidance materials were transitioned to MkDocs, which is best practice for web-based documentation platforms. Step-by-step instructions, illustrated through a simple design, clear pictures, and an intuitive hierarchical structure, guide users through all available aspects of the public platform, secure workspaces, and the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool.

The user guide is available in English, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.



Technical brief on summary of tools for participatory spatial planning

This brief introduces a subset of participatory spatial prioritization tools that primarily build on existing

prioritization software and provide user-friendly interfaces to facilitate use by non-technical experts. The three tools

included in the brief – ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool, Marxan Planning Platform (MaPP), and WePlan-Forests – have been compiled with the goal of supporting national policymakers and technical experts to understand and access tools for their national needs and work around Target 1 of the KMGBF.

The technical brief is available in English, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

An operational framework to map ELSAs for biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development

This pre-print manuscript showcases the ELSA process carried out for Ecuador, where the use of real-time scenario analyses enabled diverse stakeholder groups to collaborate to assess national priorities for nature, climate, and sustainable development, view trade-offs and synergies, and arrive at a spatial plan to guide national action. ELSA presented an actionable approach for Ecuador, and 12 other pilot countries, to create a spatial plan aimed at fulfilling their national and international commitments to nature, including to the KMGBF. The manuscript was revised based on reviewer feedback and resubmitted for publication to a peer-reviewed journal in 2025.

Partner Article: A Short History of Systematic Conservation Planning and Its Increasing Importance in Abating Earth's Biodiversity Crisis

This external scientific paper reviews the history and context of the systematic conservation planning discipline and highlights the ELSA approach as an applicable tool developed to bridge the gap between spatial plans, implementation, and forward-looking innovations needed to deliver on the goals of the KMGBF.

These exercises have been improving in terms of the use of national data. They have reduced the error and uncertainty of global models. These approaches provide an initial perspective on what can be done for national and local public policies.

Andrés Factos
CBD National Focal Point / Specialist at the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MAE)

Events and trainings held in 2025:

European Space Agency BioSpace25 meeting – Biodiversity insight from Space, Frascati, Italy - February 2025

Presented a demo showcasing UNBL at BioSpace25, which generated much interest during and after the session. BioSpace25 brought together ecologists and remote sensing experts for discussions around data for policy decisions.

Conservation International and UNCCD Secretariat workshop – Integrating climate change considerations into integrated land use planning under the UNCCD, Bonn, Germany – April 2025

Presented the ELSA Tool at a Conservation International-led invite-only workshop, and enabled UNBL to build strong connections to Conservation International, GIZ, and the UNCCD Secretariat, helping to identify further opportunities to build on the ELSA Tool to better promote integrated planning across the Rio Conventions.

LDN Technical Support Project 2.0, Johannesburg, South Africa – May 2025

Presented various applications of UNBL and the ELSA Tool for work under the UNCCD at an invite-only in-person inception workshop for the LDN Technical Support Project 2.0, organized by the UNCCD Secretariat, to over 100 participants.

NBSAP Regional Dialogue, Cape Town, South Africa – May 2025

Presented UNBL features that can support national action to deliver on the KMGBF at an invite-only NBSAP Regional Dialogue organized by the CBD Secretariat, UNEP, and SANBI for Parties in the Southern African region. The presentation was given to over 100 participants.

International Congress for Conservation Biology, Brisbane – June 2025

Presented on UNBL and ELSA to the scientific community at two invite-only symposia. This included a session organized by the leads of the IUCN WCPA Taskforce on Spatial Planning and a session on climate-smart spatial planning organized by the University of Queensland.

GEF-8 Umbrella Programme on NBSAP/7NR Webinar on Integrated Spatial Planning Webinar - September 2025

Delivered a presentation on the ELSA Tool and its use in South Africa for all GEF-eligible Parties participating in the GEF-8 Umbrella Support Project, with simultaneous interpretation to French and Spanish. The event was attended by 121 participants from 51 countries.

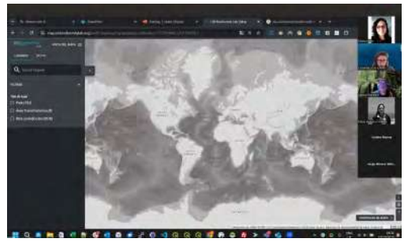
Official Launch Event of the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on UNBL, CBD SBSTTA27, Panama – October 2025

UNBL, in partnership with SANBI, Cuba, Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa, officially announced the launch of the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on UNBL at a side-event during the SBSTTA27 conference in Panama. The tool is the culmination of over five years of work led by UNDP, in collaboration with the UNBL partnership and with funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. The event was attended by over 40 participants and garnered high interest in the tool.

Overall presence at CBD SBSTTA27, Panama – October 2025

Presentations were given at three additional SBSTTA27 events on enhanced UNBL functions and applications of ELSA at the national level, including: GEF-8 Side Event on Monitoring (Day 1 | Day 2), Pathways for coordinated national monitoring systems, and at the NBSAP Help Desk. These events cumulatively reached over 200 participants, and 11 Parties and 4 TSCCs directly expressed interest in collaboration with UNBL to support national action around the CBD.

Training series on enhanced UNBL functionalities for all pilot countries part of the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project – October/November 2025



The training series provided webinar-format lectures and live hands-on training sessions on functionalities of UNBL's public platform, secure workspaces, and the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool. The training series was available to all national stakeholders of countries taking part in the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project: Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Malawi, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

75 participants attended at least one English training session, and 80 participants attended at least one Spanish training session.

COOP4CBD Training and Networking Session on Technical and Scientific Cooperation and the Clearing-House Mechanism in the Context of the UN CBD – November 2025

UNBL was presented remotely in a session focusing on tools helping to gather and integrate data in policy monitoring and reporting processes. Other highlighted tools included GBIF and BON in a Box. This session on tools was part of a Training and Networking session on the Clearing House Mechanism & Technical and Scientific Co-operation, with focused discussions around monitoring and reporting processes for 3 days.

Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA7), Nairobi, Kenya – December 2025

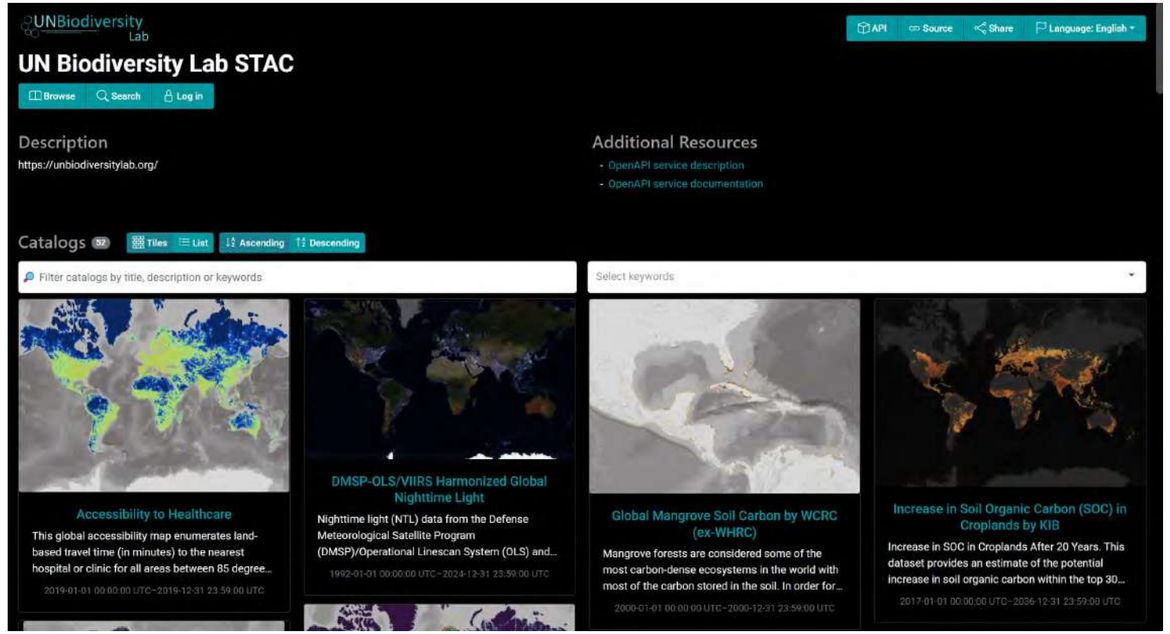
UNBL was presented as a featured tool at UNEA7, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback. UNBL was also specifically selected as part of a UNEP presentation on the World Environment Situation Room (WESR) to the Queen of Denmark – the UN Biodiversity Patron – during the High-Level segment of UNEA7, who expressed great interest in UNBL functionalities and use.

One Health FAIR Data workshops and meetings – November/December 2025

UNBL was presented at several Quadripartite and PREZODE workshops, including the Quadripartite Regional Workshop held in Bangkok from 25 to 27 November and the Pandemic Fund session on 28 November. Additionally, a presentation was given on linking UNBL data on biodiversity and ecosystem services to One Health on 12 December. All of these engagements have generated strong interest in further collaboration.

5 | UNBL user outreach and national applications

The UNBL Partnership supports users directly to access and leverage UNBL's functionalities to advance national and sub-national work towards conservation and sustainable development. In addition to our training and capacity building program, we work one-on-one with our users to create workspaces tailored to meet their needs and address their inquiries. In 2025, the UNBL Partnership additionally engaged with nine countries through dedicated projects to support national applications of UNBL to support national needs around development and implementation of their NBSAPs and preparation of the 7NR to CBD.



CAMBODIA

The Ministry of Environment became the first pilot user of a novel UNBL STAC catalogue, which provides seamless access to global data. The goal of this collaboration was to enrich the national spatial data platform CEMIS, developed by the Ministry of Environ-ment with support from UNDP.

The UNBL team provided training and access to the UNBL STAC including 16 datasets, 50 layers and 250 assets for use in CEMIS.

The UNDP Country Office, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, has expressed interest in using the UNBL open STAC to add relevant global data to CEMIS.

COLOMBIA

In 2026, the Ministry of Environment continued to advance with the application of a spatial OECM evaluation methodology developed in partnership with the UNBL team. The ministry is using this approach to prioritize potential OECMs for site-level evaluation and recognition in the country.

Additionally, representatives from the Ministry of Environment and the Humboldt Institute participated in the project Expert Advisory Committee to provide early input into the development of enhanced UNBL functionalities, including the ELSA Tool.

COSTA RICA

Representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the PRIAS Lab participated in the project Expert Advisory Committee to provide early input into the development of enhanced UNBL functionalities, including the ELSA Tool.

Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA) and UN Biodiversity Lab. 2025. Technical report on the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in Cuba. Essential Life Support Area (ELSA) prioritization map created using spatial data and the UNBL's ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on 10 December 2025.

This is a tool that could—and should—be used as a key input in the urban planning processes led by the Urban Territorial Planning Institute.

José Gerhartz
Territorial Planning Specialist at the Physical Planning Institute of Cuba (formerly IPF, now INOTU)

CUBA

What was the goal of this collaboration?

In 2025, the Ministry of Environment of Cuba prioritized updating its NBSAP and preparing the country's 7NR to CBD. This collaboration aimed to strengthen both efforts by applying the ELSA Tool, drawing on data on UNBL, and using the UNBL national workspace to support integrated spatial planning and reporting.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Cuba to meet this goal?

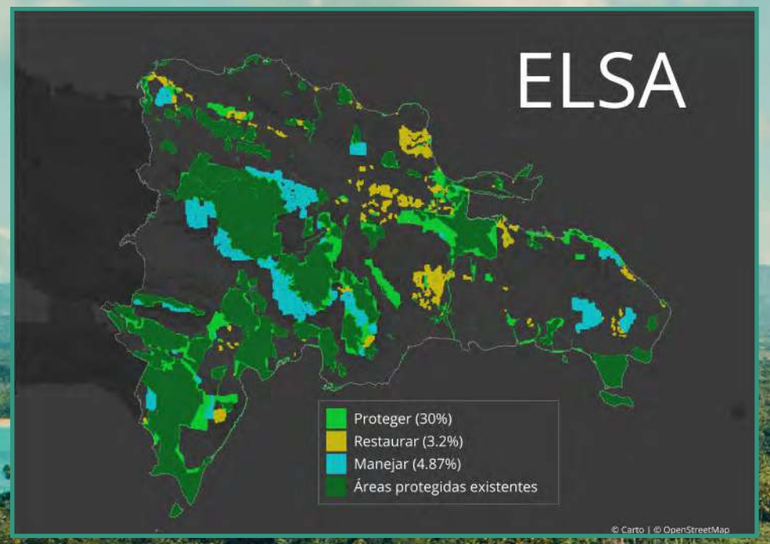
The UNBL team worked closely with the government to design activities and engagement strategies tailored to national needs. Across seven sessions, national experts and institutions participated in working groups on integrated spatial planning and monitoring and reporting. These sessions helped ensure that tools, data, and analyses were aligned with Cuba's priorities.

What products resulted from this work?

- A national spatial prioritization map produced with the ELSA Tool to support implementation of the NBSAP and the KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for Cuba that incorporates national datasets.
- A UNBL national workspace serving as a centralized repository for 14 priority datasets relevant to NBSAP implementation and the 7NR.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods, a policy note to support decision-makers, and a project impact story.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Cuba?

Cuba's CBD National Focal Point and leading national institutions see strong potential for continued use of the ELSA map and UNBL platform to support implementation of the NBSAP and preparation of the 7NR. The government has expressed interest in updating spatial prioritization maps using the ELSA Tool and regularly uploading new datasets to the UNBL workspace. These ongoing efforts are helping reduce data fragmentation, improve data accessibility, and strengthen evidence-based environmental planning across the country.



Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and UN Biodiversity Lab. 2025. Essential Life Support Area (ELSA) priority action map created using national and global spatial data available in the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on UNBL.

For the Dominican Republic, it has been of great interest and importance to be able to count on the support of UNBL to integrate geospatial data into the conservation and management of biodiversity, which will serve for decision making, the updating of the new National Biodiversity Strategy, and the formulation of the Seventh National Biodiversity Report, not to mention the opportunity to build capacity in the application of this technology.

Marina Hernández
Director, Directorate of Biodiversity, Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources of the Dominican Republic

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL supported the Dominican Republic in updating the country's ELSA map, originally produced in collaboration with UNDP in 2021. This work aimed to strengthen ongoing national efforts related to the development and implementation of the NBSAP and broader commitments under the KMGBF.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in the Dominican Republic to meet this goal?

UNBL worked with national stakeholders through a results-sharing session to present the updated ELSA map and discuss its relevance for national biodiversity planning and implementation.

What products resulted from this work?

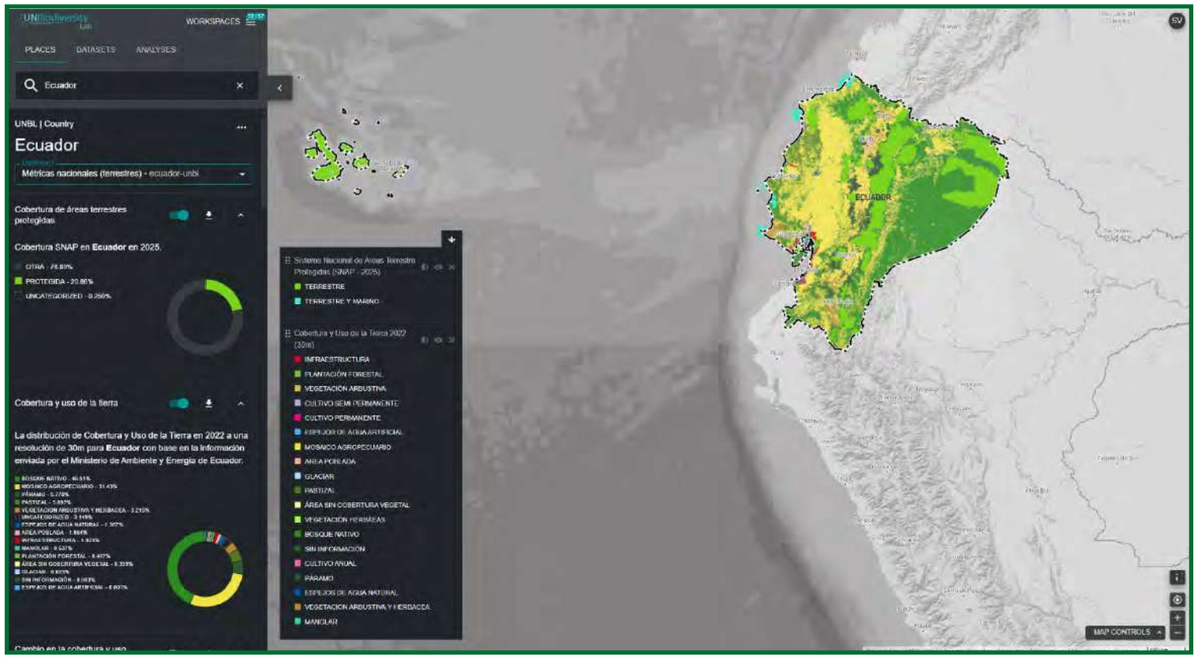
- A spatial prioritization map created using the ELSA Tool to guide national action on national policy commitments and the KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for the Dominican Republic that incorporates national datasets.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in the Dominican Republic?

The Dominican Republic's CBD National Focal Point sees strong potential for the ELSA map and the UNBL platform to support continued NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR. The government has also expressed interest in continuing to use the UNBL platform to upload updated datasets periodically and update the spatial prioritization map using the ELSA Tool.

With this clear example, we can identify many specific needs for prioritization. This will help achieve national and international objectives. It is important to highlight the generation of local-level information to feed this tool. This will allow us to redefine national policy and align it with what territories truly need, with a focus on conservation.

Henry Guzmán
Technical Specialist at the Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE)



MAE, CONGOPE, AME and UN Biodiversity Lab. 2025. Technical report on the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in the Carchi, Imbabura and Pichincha regions of Ecuador. Custom metrics created using national spatial data and the UNBL's custom metric functionality in March 2026.

ECUADOR

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL's work with Ecuador aimed to support the use of spatial data and planning for NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR. The collaboration aligned closely with the GEF-8 Umbrella Support Programme for NBSAP/7NR as well as related initiatives including the Bezos Prioritizing Nature Project and Nature Transition Support Pathways (NTSP). Ecuador also piloted the first use of the ELSA Tool for the sub-national region of Carchi–Imbabura–Pichincha and became the first country to pilot UNBL's new national data metrics.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Ecuador to meet this goal?

National and regional stakeholders from government, UN, and relevant NGOs participated in a hybrid inception workshop, seven virtual sessions on topics in integrated spatial planning as well as monitoring and reporting, and a final hybrid results-sharing workshop.

What products resulted from this work?

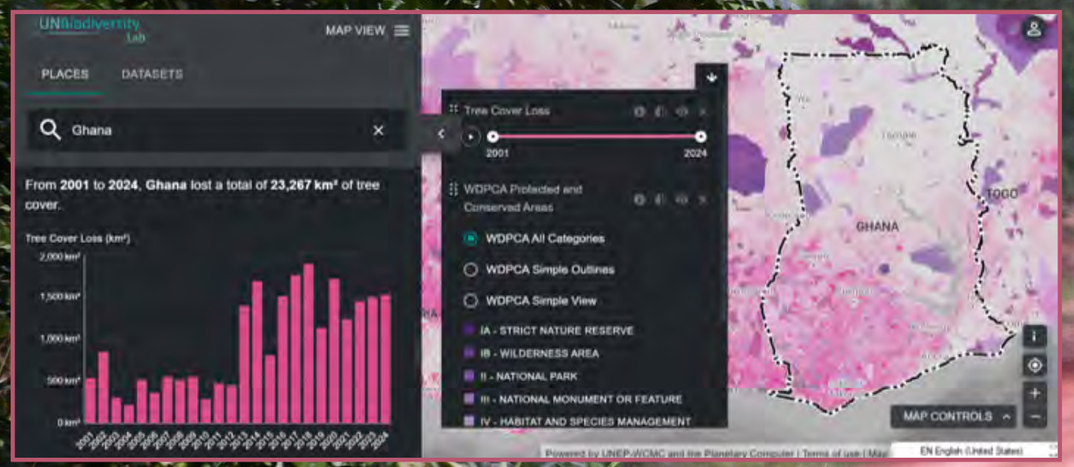
- A spatial prioritization map created using the ELSA Tool to guide sub-national action on the KMGBF in the Carchi–Imbabura–Pichincha region.
- An ELSA Tool configuration using national datasets for Carchi–Imbabura–Pichincha.
- A UNBL workspace for Ecuador serving as a centralized repository for 24 national datasets relevant to NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR.
- National metrics within the UNBL workspace on land use and land cover, above-ground forest biomass, human footprint, and deforestation.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods, a policy note to support decision-makers, and a project impact story.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Ecuador?

Ecuador's CBD National Focal Point, together with representatives from the Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments (CONGOPE) and the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME), have indicated that both national and subnational ELSA maps will be key resources supporting NBSAP implementation. UNBL also provides resources that can support the preparation of the 7NR.

The ELSA tool on UNBL is a response to the KMGBF's mantra of 'whole-of-government and whole-of-society' because the tool is data-driven from all stakeholders who hold ownership too.

Dr. Yaw Osei-Owusu
Executive Director, Conservation Alliance, Ghana



MEST & UN Biodiversity Lab, 2025. Technical Report for the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in Ghana. Tree Cover Loss metric and World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas in Ghana available on UNBL.

Hansen, M. C., P. V. Potapov, R. Moore, M. Hancher, S. A. Turubanova, A. Tyukavina, D. Thau, S. V. Stehman, S. J. Goetz, T. R. Loveland, A. Kommareddy, A. Egorov, L. Chini, C. O. Justice, and J. R. G. Townshend. 2013. "High-Resolution Global Maps of 21st-Century Forest Cover Change." Science 342 (15 November): 850–53.

UNEP-WCMC and IUCN (2026), "The World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA)". Cambridge, UK: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net.

GHANA

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL's work with Ghana aimed to strengthen the use of spatial data and planning in NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR. This work aligned with the GEF-8 Umbrella Support Programme for NBSAP/7NR as well as related initiatives including the National Monitoring Support Initiative (NMSI) and NTSP.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Ghana to meet this goal?

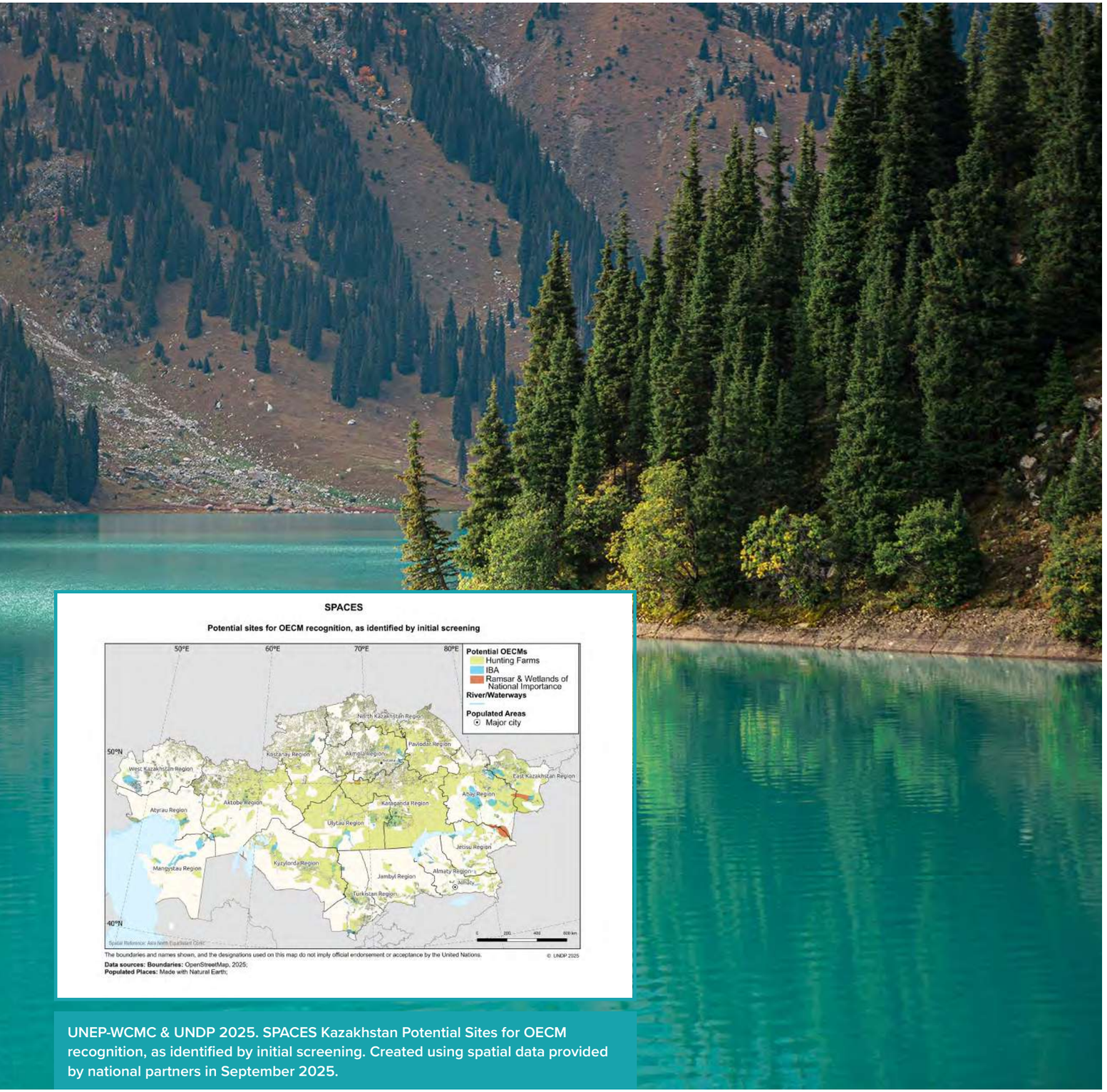
National and regional stakeholders from government, UN, and relevant NGOs participated in an inception workshop, seven virtual sessions on topics in integrated spatial planning as well as monitoring and reporting, and a final in-person results-sharing workshop.

What products resulted from this work?

- A spatial prioritization map created using the ELSA Tool to guide national action on the KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for Ghana incorporating national datasets.
- A UNBL workspace for Ghana serving as a centralized repository for 13 national datasets relevant to NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR.
- Three dedicated sessions to build national capacity on the KMGBF monitoring framework and assess the adequacy of global datasets for filling national data gaps.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods, a policy note to support decision-makers, and a project impact story.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Ghana?

Ghana's CBD National Focal Point and representatives from key national institutions have indicated that UNBL will serve as a primary resource supporting preparation of the country's 7NR.



UNEP-WCMC & UNDP 2025. SPACES Kazakhstan Potential Sites for OECM recognition, as identified by initial screening. Created using spatial data provided by national partners in September 2025.

KAZAKHSTAN

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL's work with Kazakhstan focused on advancing spatial prioritization through the SPACES initiative. This initiative brought together the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, UNDP, UNEP-WCMC, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), and a broad coalition of national stakeholders to strengthen spatial planning for biodiversity conservation and NBSAP implementation.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Kazakhstan to meet this goal?

Stakeholder engagement included three hybrid workshops (an inception workshop, a mid-term workshop, and a closing results-sharing workshop) as well as six sessions dedicated to spatial planning.

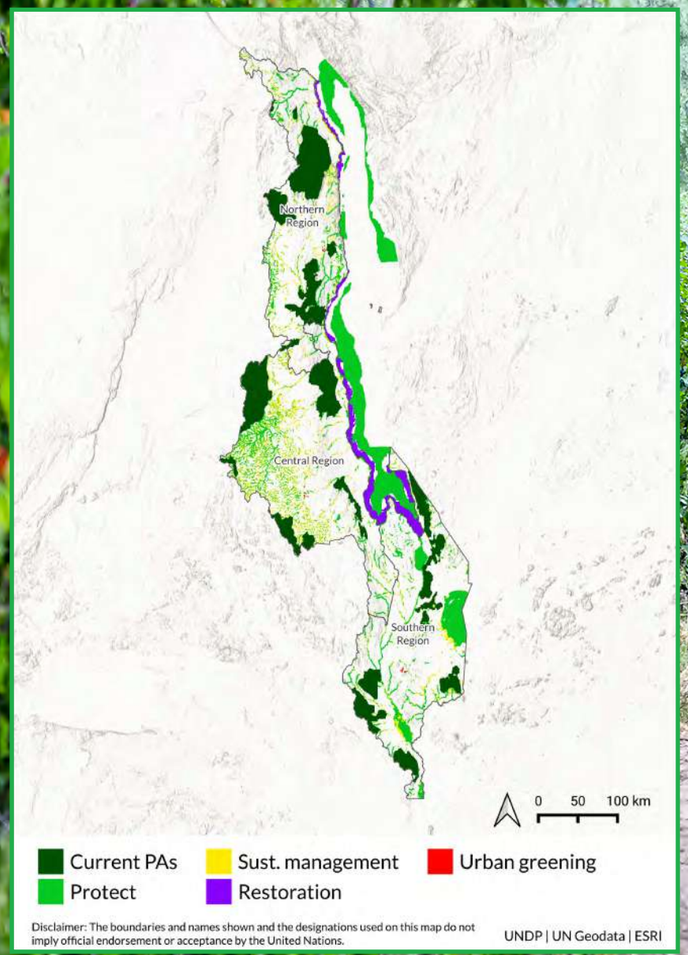
What products resulted from this work?

- Two spatial prioritization maps created using the ELSA Tool to guide national action on the NBSAP and the KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for Kazakhstan using national datasets.
- A UNBL workspace serving as a centralized repository for all 45 datasets used in the spatial prioritization process.
- A spatial analysis assessing potential OECMs.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods and a policy note to support decision-makers.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Kazakhstan?

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) plans to use the outputs of SPACES Kazakhstan to support the design and implementation of the Spatial Plan for Biodiversity Conservation Roadmap, which contributes to national biodiversity targets and the KMGBF. The spatial datasets and prioritization maps will also inform the country's upcoming 7NR, the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan, and the General Scheme for the Organization of Kazakhstan's Territory until 2030.

In addition, the spatial data will support future conservation actions including expansion of the Ustyurt Reserve, development of new protected areas (Tukty National Park, Caspian Itbalygy Reserve), creation of ecological corridors (Kokshetau Uplands), and initiatives such as sustainable agricultural systems, conservation of northern ecosystems, reintroduction of the Turan tiger, and protection of the Caspian seal.



Environmental Affairs Department & UN Biodiversity Lab. 2025. Technical Report for the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in Malawi. Essential Life Support Area (ELSA) priority action map created using spatial data and the UNBL Essential Life Support Area Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on 12 December 2025.

MALAWI

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL's work with Malawi aimed to strengthen the use of spatial data and planning to support NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR. This work aligned with the GEF-8 Umbrella Support Programme for NBSAP/7NR as well as related initiatives including NMSI NTSP.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Malawi to meet this goal?

National and regional stakeholders from government, UN, and relevant NGOs participated in a hybrid inception workshop, four virtual sessions on topics in integrated spatial planning as well as monitoring and reporting, and a final hybrid results-sharing workshop.

What products resulted from this work?

- A spatial prioritization map created using the ELSA Tool to guide national action on the NBSAP and KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for Malawi using national datasets.
- A UNBL workspace serving as a centralized repository for 28 national datasets relevant to NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR.
- An updated ecosystem protection index indicator for use as a national indicator in the 7NR.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods, a policy note to support decision-makers, and a project impact story.

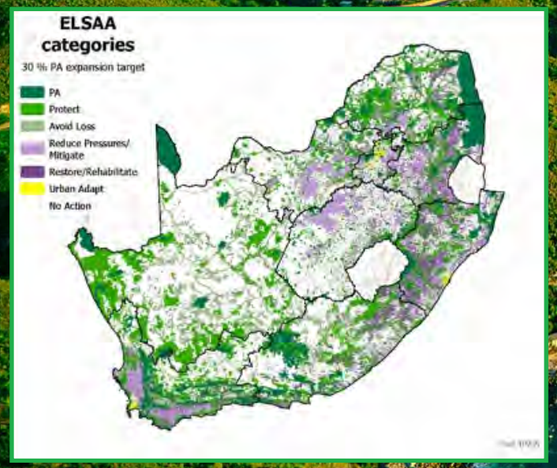
What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Malawi?

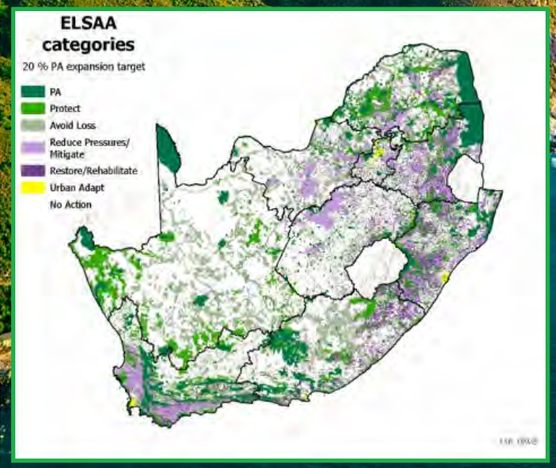
Malawi's CBD National Focal Point and the NBSAP working group plan to incorporate the final ELSA map into the country's NBSAP. UNBL will also be used to support development of the 7NR.

SOUTH AFRICA

As we are reimagining conservation in South Africa, especially the work around expansion of our conservation estate, it's important that we don't leave anyone behind. It was very fortunate for us to be involved in the ELSA project, because the ELSA map enabled us to support joint planning and decision-making by all entities that are invested in our natural resources.

Mukondi Matshusa, Chief Director for Biodiversity Management & Permitting in the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa





DFFE, SANBI, and UN Biodiversity Lab. 2025. Technical Report for the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in South Africa. Essential Life Support Action Area (ELSAA) Map created using spatial data and the UNBL Essential Life Support Action Area Integrated Spatial Planning Tool on 30 January 2026.

What was the goal of this collaboration?

UNBL supported the update of South Africa's ELSA map, originally produced in collaboration with UNDP in 2021. The goal was to strengthen national efforts related to conservation, restoration, and sustainable use, including commitments under the CBD and UNCCD.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in South Africa to meet this goal?

Stakeholder engagement included two sessions to co-create an updated ELSA map and a results-sharing session with national partners.

What products resulted from this work?

- A spatial prioritization map created using the ELSA Tool to guide national action on national policy commitments and the KMGBF.
- A customized ELSA Tool configuration for South Africa using national datasets.
- A UNBL workspace serving as a centralized repository for eight national datasets relevant to NBSAP implementation and preparation of the 7NR.
- A technical report explaining scientific methods, a policy note to support decision-makers, and a project impact story.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in South Africa?

ELSA and UNBL outputs have been incorporated into multiple national policy processes and projects, including the 30x30 implementation scenarios strategy, the National Biodiversity Assessment 2025, the draft 7NR, and the accepted GEF-8 project proposal on conservation, development, and livelihoods. The outputs are also used to assess potential sites for restoration investments and as input data for several national initiatives.

SANBI sees strong potential for continued use of these tools nationally and across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region through its role as the TSCC.

SRI LANKA

What was the goal of this collaboration?

The collaboration aimed to support synergies across the Rio Conventions while strengthening national capacity to use UNBL tools. UNBL worked directly with the national team to support processes related to LDN, NDCs, and the NBSAP.

How did UNBL work with stakeholders in Sri Lanka to meet this goal?

UNBL provided training and technical support to the national team and worked closely with government counterparts to develop methodologies and spatial analyses related to land degradation and national environmental planning.

What products resulted from this work?

- A methodology to identify land degradation-vulnerable areas in Sri Lanka.
- A national land degradation map to support decision-making related to NBSAP targets, NDCs, and LDN targets (to be finalized in early 2026).
- Consolidated datasets made available to civil society, key stakeholders, and universities for further analysis.

What impacts and applications are emerging from the use of UNBL in Sri Lanka?

The project helped address government priorities to harmonize planning across the NBSAP, LDN, and NDC processes. By supporting the development of national spatial analyses, the collaboration produced tools that can guide subnational decision-making and planning.

Beginning in 2026, Sri Lanka plans to use the UNBL workspace to make final maps and datasets accessible to authorized users for further analysis and policy support.

Additional user outreach activities in 2025

Workspaces

256 user-specific workspaces on the platform.

117 countries represented across workspace users.

19 new workspaces created in 2025.

Workspace purpose

- Create a community of practice
- Upload national data or connect to existing data repositories
- Calculate dynamic metrics for specific areas of interest

57 workspaces created as official national repositories for UNDP country offices and governments.

17 set up with official national data and an ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool.

Workspaces in UNBL by sector

One-on-one support

100+ responses to technical support inquiries.

- Accessing data
- Creating workspaces
- Uploading data
- Potential collaboration
- General troubleshooting

UNBL user research study

- User personas
- User journeys
- User needs
- Platform recommendations

4 government officials participated in structured, in-depth interviews on usability.

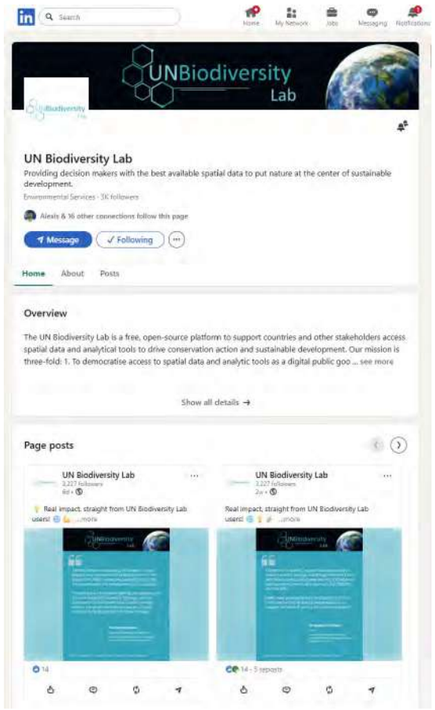
212 users responded to a questionnaire on use of UNBL.

14 users responded to a survey on workspace use.

6 | UNBL communications

The UNBL Partnership builds high-level communication resources to raise awareness of the platform and encourage its use. It also aims to establish the UNBL as a trustworthy resource for national-level planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting for the KMGBF.

In 2025, the UNBL Partnership produced the following communication products:

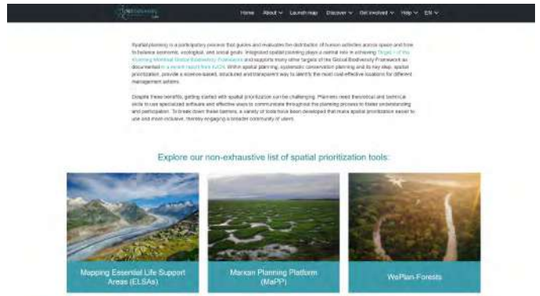


UNBL LinkedIn channel

The new UNBL channel on LinkedIn, launched in October 2025, is intended to keep current users updated around new datasets and functionalities on UNBL, as well as events UNBL participates in, with the additional mission of increasing engagement with new users. The UNBL team works on an average of one post per week with support from the UNEP-WCMC Communications team. As of February 2026, the channel has 3,227 followers. The most popular post is around the updated Key Biodiversity Areas dataset, end of November 2025, with 786 likes, 18 comments and 136 reposts.

Updated UNBL trailer

The UNBL focal video trailer has been updated to reflect enhanced functionalities and the launch of the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool.



Integrated Spatial Planning Page on UNBL

In collaboration with partners, the UNBL team produced a new page on UNBL specifically tailored to highlighting and explaining integrated spatial planning tools (ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool, Marxan Planning Platform (MaPP), and WePlan-Forests) that can be used to support action around the KMGBF.

The webpage contains key decision-making information designed to orient interested users on which planning tool would be most useful for their national interests.

Impact stories with pilot countries of the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project

UNBL collaborated with national partners to create 5 in-depth impact stories with pilot countries to document use cases. These impact stories have been written and approved by national collaborators from each country in national language, and published by the respective UNDP Country Offices and focal Ministry/ partner institutions at key junctures in 2026, maximizing uptake and impact.

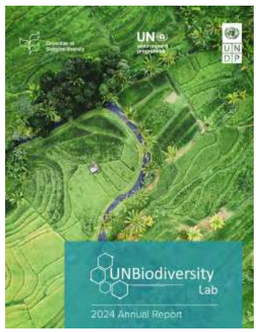
Cuba | Malawi | Ghana | South Africa

Press releases in Ecuador and Ghana around ELSA

In partnership with UNDP Country Offices and national focal institutions, the UNBL team developed press releases commemorating the opening of the UNBL-GBF Mapping Project in Ecuador and Ghana.

Blog on use of ELSA and UNBL in Ecuador

In partnership with the UNDP Country Office in Ecuador, the UNBL team wrote a blog that highlights sustained engagement with UNBL and ELSA over the past nine years.



UNBL 2024 Annual Report

Highlights key activities and accomplishments of the UNBL Partnership in 2024. The report is available in here.

Countries in the South African Development Community (SADC) have expressed the need to address data gaps and fragmentation, build technical capacity, and create national and regional dashboards to monitor and report on their NBSAPs and the GBF. SANBI sees great potential to collaborate with the UNBL partnership to build scalable solutions to support the Seventh and Eighth National Reports.

Ntakadzeni Tshidada
Lead, SANBI Technical Support Center

Looking forward

As we look towards 2026, we have a narrowing policy window as countries continue to revise and begin implementation of their national biodiversity plans under the CBD, as well as the equivalent national policy documents for accelerated, focused action on climate change, land degradataion and restoration. These policy documents will guide national action for the next five years, one of the most critical windows to bend the curve on biodiversity loss and to address the climate crisis. 2026 additionally marks the deadline for national reporting across the three UN conventions on biodiversity, climate, and land. These reports provide an opportunity to assess collective progress, as well as a challenge to identify and use the necessary data to meaningfully monitor against international commitments. UNBL exists to support this critical work.

Key UNBL activities on the horizon for 2026 include:

1 | UNBL governance

The UNBL Partnership will continue to build relationships with key partners and spatial tool developers supporting national action around the KMGBF and its monitoring framework, to refine activities in support of the UNBL Strategic Plan 2022-2030, and to fundraise for sustained engagement and self-sufficiency of the UNBL platform.

2 | UNBL development

The UNBL Partnership will ensure that UNBL systems will be kept up to date with the latest technology and versioning necessary to maintain stability and responsiveness in the long term, as well as resolve bugs and implement minor improvements to the backend and frontend for smooth operation. In addition, a prioritized subset of new developments aimed at further alignment with the needs of countries and subregional TSCCs in relation to the KMGBF will be implemented, including: a species selector tool enabling users to select species data from GBIF observational data, IUCN Species Red List data and Species Distribution models, as available; refinement of the ELSA Integrated Spatial Planning Tool to accommodate specific technical requests from South Africa and as a proof of concept for additional add-ons of similar nature; and exploration of opportunities for Artificial Intelligence integration on the platform.

3 | UNBL data

The UNBL Partnership will continue to update and expand its existing global and regional data offering on UNBL based on UNBL data standards, to ensure UNBL continues to be an international reference for accessing spatial data on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. Additionally, an open instance of the UNBL STAC will be implemented and populated with open-access data to facilitate users' access to relevant datasets and enable interoperability with offline GIS desktop platforms; and a revision of the UNBL's current Data Fitness Assessment Criteria will be made specifically to increase uptake of regional data submitted by TSCCs and increase their visibility through hosting on the UNBL platform.

4 | UNBL training, capacity building and events

The UNBL Partnership will focus on training and capacity building to support low- and middle-income countries to use spatial data and planning to support NBSAP updates, NBSAP implementation, and 7NR development. This will include UNBL trainings for countries in partnership with regional TSCCs, focused activities for engagement with TSCCs that maximize impact, and presentations at selected events on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, including COP17.

5 | UNBL user outreach

The UNBL Partnership will continue to provide high-quality assistance to all users in planning, monitoring, and reporting on the KMGBF. User responsiveness will be enhanced through offerings of weekly live 30-minute 'Lab Sessions' open to all users of UNBL with questions around functionalities of and use cases for UNBL, as well as improved record-keeping for workspace creation, troubleshooting instances, and further applied ad hoc work. In addition, in collaboration with the GEF-8 Umbrella Programme on NBSAP/7NR, UNBL will offer at-cost services to support Parties in their work around integrated spatial planning.

6 | UNBL communications

The UNBL Partnership will further develop communications materials to promote spatial data and planning approaches to deliver relevant elements of the KMGBF at national level and provide clear roadmaps on how UNBL supports these efforts. This will include enhancing the current user guidance documentation with video tutorials on YouTube; updating the 'Using Spatial Data for Biodiversity' course on Learning for Nature to reflect the latest developments in international policy and functionalities of UNBL; and strategic communications products aligned with important international events.

In addition to these core UNBL offerings, 2026 will be a landmark year for fundraising. To ensure that we can continue to deliver relevant services for the countries we work with and beyond, the UNBL partnership plans to mobilize a more diversified set of donors with the goal of building a donor coalition that sustains UNBL to 2030. To complement these efforts, UNBL will develop a three-tiered at-cost service model that is scalable, flexible, and tailored to country needs, from open-access (Tier 1) to light support (Tier 2) to co-developed national partnerships (Tier 3). This model is designed to support the entire policy cycle, including planning (e.g. spatial prioritization), implementation (e.g. national biodiversity plans, restoration), and reporting (e.g. KMGBF indicator calculation and national reporting to the CBD). By combining this service offering with a portfolio of donor investments, our goal is to provide strategic, user-driven support for spatial data and planning to governments, while continuing to harness the latest technological advances to develop UNBL through feedback-driven updates, user testing, and customization based on national capacity and needs.

Partners & Donors

Special thanks go to the following donors and partners who have made the UNBL Partnership's achievements possible:

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Microsoft

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Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in New York
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

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Convening partners

Convention on Biological Diversity

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Microsoft

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UNBL Team

Learn about the team behind this work on the UNBL team page.

UNBL Social

Follow our UNBL partner accounts & #UNBiodiversityLab for regular updates:

- UNBL: LinkedIn
- CBD: X | LinkedIn | Facebook
- UNDP: X | LinkedIn | Facebook
- UNEP: X | LinkedIn | Facebook
- UNEP-WCMC: X | LinkedIn | Facebook

List of abbreviations

7NR	Seventh National Report
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
DaRT	Data Reporting Tool
ELSA	Essential Life Support Area
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
KMGBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NMSI	National Monitoring Support Initiative
NTSP	Nature Transition Support Pathways
OECM	Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure
PRIAS	Programa de Investigaciones Aerotransportadas (Airborne Research Program)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANBI	South African National Biodiversity Institute
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
STAC	SpatioTemporal Asset Catalog
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TSCC	Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centre
UN	United Nations
UNBL	UN Biodiversity Lab
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WDPCA	World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

www.unbiodiversitylab.org